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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 009174

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2026

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SUBJECT: CROWN PRINCE REITERATES SAUDI NONINTERFERENCE
POLICY ON IRAQ TO SENATOR NELSON

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Classified By: Charge D'Affaires Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1.(S) SUMMARY. Crown Prince Sultan told Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) during their December 17 meeting that without reconciliation, the problems in Iraq will only increase. He reiterated the SAG's policy of noninterference and support for forces advocating a unified Iraq, noting that the U.S. should have anticipated Iran's (and Turkey's) interference in Iraq's internal affairs. The Crown Prince supported a gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces and lauded the Iraqi Prime Minister's call for former Iraqi security service members to rejoin those forces. He suggested economic and political pressure on Iran would be more effective than military action, and stated that Syrian President Al Asad will eventually take the "right path."

12. (S) Senator Bill Nelson (D-FL) conveyed his thanks to Crown Prince Sultan during their December 17 meeting for the SAG's efforts relating to Iraq. The Crown Prince responded that everyone should be concerned about the situation there, lamenting the "daily bloodshed" and expressing hope that a democratic solution can be found. He emphasized that the Iraqis need to understand that without reconciliation, their problems will only increase. The SAG opposes a precipitous withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq, he continued, warning that such a move would have grave consequences. He said the U.S. should have anticipated Iran's (and Turkey's) interference in Iraq, suggesting that sanctions might be a useful tool to control Iran.

13. (S) Senator Nelson stated that a stable Iraq would mitigate any foreign interference and that Saudi engagement of Iraq's Sunni leadership would be key to effecting that. The Crown Prince responded that, while the "Sunnis are close to us," the Saudis do not differentiate between Sunni, Shi'a, or Kurd as "all are deserving of respect." The Crown Prince reiterated the position that all Senator Nelson's interlocutors took during his two days of meetings -- that the SAG would support any entity advocating a unified Iraq and would maintain its policy of noninterference. "We are

with the oppressed," said the Crown Prince, "until they get their rights."

14. (S) Crown Prince Sultan continued that a gradual U.S. withdrawal from Iraq would be a better solution, but that the Iraqis must be sufficiently organized to accommodate a "well studied series of steps." He noted the recent speech of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki, lauding his efforts to bring back to the security services those members who had been fired after liberation. Most of those who had worked with Saddam Hussein, he said, had done so out of compulsion, not conviction. He claimed that that Iraq would be affected by a withdrawal, but not Saudi Arabia because "we have loyal people and full trust in the bilateral relationship."

15. (S) Turning to Iran, the Crown Prince said the Saudis are "against the bomb." He stated that political and economic pressure on Iran would be far more effective than a military solution, and laughed openly when the senator suggested that this might not be sufficient. He noted that Hatiz Al Asad had been a "friend of the Kingdom," supporting it politically, economically, and morally. He said Bashar Al Asad has a "good heart," but is surrounded by a group of "influencers" who are negatively impacting his views. The Crown Prince continued that the world no longer accepts a "state within a state" and that Al Asad's "influencers" believe Saudi Arabia played a role in Syria being banned from Lebanon. It is tradition that we support our Muslim brothers, he said, and when we supported the withdrawal of Syrian troops, it was in everyone's best interests -- including Syria's.

16. (S) The Crown Prince was optimistic that if Saudi Arabia continues to work to convince Syria to leave Lebanon alone, it eventually will. He hoped that Syria will ultimately take the "right path," adding that it should concentrate on its own problems before focusing on those of other countries. He indicated that a stable Iraq would be good for Syria, but

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pointed out that Al Asad is ambitious. Senator Nelson recounted his recent meeting with the Syrian President, conveying that Al Asad downplayed any potential Iranian threat. The Crown Prince responded that "wishes are one thing, reality another." Regarding the SAG's ability to work with Iran, the Crown Prince replied that it is a difficult situation, but Saudi Arabia does not have any apparent difficulties with Iran at the moment. However, he emphasized, frankness is best.

17. (S) The Crown Prince raised the issue of arms sales and invited Senator Nelson to visit the military base the U.S. helped to build and which housed many of the 700,000 allied troops that rotated through Saudi Arabia during the Gulf War. (NOTE: This appears to be a reference to the King Khalid Military City. END NOTE.) The Senator responded that the USG would continue working with the SAG on issues relating to AWACs and weapons systems, noting also the good cooperation between the intelligence services.

18. (U) CODEL Nelson has not reviewed this message.

GFOELLER